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MERGER ISSUE

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EDITORIAL

IT is an honor to assume the office of Editor of *The Unitarian Christian* following the distinguished editorship of Dr. Charles Edwards Park who has guided our publication with wisdom and sensitivity for the past eight years. It would be madness to think of filling the place of so distinguished a predecessor without the assurance of Dr. Park's continuing interest, advice and counsel. The new editor has such assurance from him and here records his appreciation.

A Year of Decision

There are exciting things going on within the Unitarian household: decisions being made, fresh thinking being done, new faces among our leadership, unprecedented growth and unlimited opportunity. With these things comes increased responsibility on the part of all of us to serve our Church with devotion and integrity. In such a time, perhaps more than ever before, there ought to be a place for the efforts of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship in the total cause of Unitarianism. The publishing of our quarterly, now in its fourteenth year, is a part of that effort, offering a free platform for an exchange of ideas, thoughts and convictions without denominational control or official sanction. We will be concerned to provide a voice for Unitarian Christianity as a valid and proper point of view within American Unitarianism at the present time, but we will be concerned with matters of interest to Unitarians generally and with liberal Christians generally.

This is the year in which we must make an important decision. Shall Unitarians and Universalists merge and become a single liberal Church in America? Or shall we resolve to go our separate ways, still enjoying mutual understanding, friendship, sympathy, but remaining organically distinct?

The values of merger are clear to many people in both denominations. The distinctions of the past do not seem to be as sharply drawn in the present and common concerns indicate that the more sensible and simpler thing to do is to merge, thus achieving simplified organizational procedures, one set of officers where there were two, and the pooling of resources, strengths, skills, in order to more effectively work toward a common goal and in a common cause.

Shall We Merge ?

For others in both denominations the whole question is put in a context of sentimentalism or idealism. Back in the decade of the twenties merger was discussed and many of those who were the young people then are the most ardent proponents of merger today. They see the question in terms of spiritual maturity. Are we Unitarians and Universalists big enough and generous enough to give up the distinctions that divide us and share with one another our hopes and dreams and aspirations for liberal Christianity not only for America but for the world? The practical considerations are not given the same importance that idealistic considerations are given. Whether we share their particular point of view or not we can and, I think, must respect it.

There is a third group which has representation in both denominations, too. It is composed of those men and women who are convinced that merger will be too costly, not in material things, but historically, spiritually, idealogically. They believe that Unitarianism means something, stands for something, has a function that distinguishes it from Universalism, and that Universalism means something, stands for something, has a function that distinguishes it from Unitarianism. Members of this group value

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Unitarian, Universalist — Two Churches or One?

Leland P. Stewart

The last several years have witnessed an increasing amount of discussion and much action among Unitarians and Universalists in the direction of complete merger between the two groups. Any number of ministers and members of these churches have stated that the differences between Unitarianism and Universalism are solely historical, that present trends point toward a single cause in both groups—the cause of liberal religion. If this is true, then merger is clearly the answer to the perplexing problem of strengthening the two churches' position in the religious world. But let us look more closely.

Unitarians even now have some quite different practices from Universalists, and perhaps for basic reasons. They centralize in the Boston headquarters most of what leadership they do seek, depending very little upon state or regional aid, as Universalists generally do. Local groups ordain their own ministers, whereas Universalist ministers are ordained by their State Conventions. Unitarians are much more political- and economic-minded, and correspondingly less concerned about symbolism, ritual, and ceremony in the church than their Universalist friends. These are but a few of the many *present* distinctions, and ones which are likely to remain if the two groups retain their uniqueness.

The Need for Synthesis

The philosopher Hegel taught a concept of change which might hint at the reason for these differences. He said that, in the process of change, a *thesis* (or set of beliefs) is met with an *antithesis* (or challenge to those beliefs due to their inadequacy to meet existing situations). Out of this clash between two opposites comes a new *synthesis* (which seeks to combine the various elements into a higher level of integration). Religiously speaking, at the present time the orthodox churches represent the thesis (or set of beliefs most commonly held in the society). To challenge the inadequacies of these beliefs for the whole society an antithesis is presented, and this is the main function of the "liberal church". At the same time, no new integration can be completed by this intermediate organization, since its primary object is to clear the way for the new synthesis by rejecting what is inadequate in the old. Consequently, a further step is needed, in order that the old and the new can be synthesized in a meaningful manner. In the modern world this is what gives rise to the search for, and the proclaiming of, a true universalism. What does this suggest in terms of Unitarian and Universalist origins and directions?

Unitarianism emerged before Universalism, and for a very important reason. Its first stress (of European origin) was that of rejecting the Christian trinity, and this was done primarily on rational grounds. Since that time Unitarian emphasis has been more and more upon religious freedom and truth-seeking. Because of its orientation to ideas it has been especially attractive to the well-educated and the professional classes, but its adherents have also come from "humanistic" persons at all levels of society.

Universalism, on the other hand, has been predominantly an American movement. Its first and most significant teaching was that of universal salvation, based upon a concern for persons. The idea of love was important at its beginning, and love has continued to be its dominant orientation to the present day. George de Benneville, an English doctor of Universalist persuasion who lived during the 18th century and primarily in America, said "Preach the Everlasting Gospel of Boundless, Universal Love for the entire human race, without exception, and for each one in particular." Salvation in this sense is not an antiquated notion, but rather the living spark that makes life at any period in history take on new meaning and purpose.

Universalism Is Greater Cause

It is a fact that, while the Unitarian movement currently is growing by leaps and bounds, the Universalists have only just begun to experience its new phase of growth. As the writer sees the situation, this is due to two major factors: (1)

Unitarianism must spread before the message of Universalism can have much meaning, and the time for liberal religion (the antithesis) has already come in the country at large: and (2) Universalists have tended to push aside the distinctive quality of their message and have been afraid lest their entire institution would be dissolved for lack of members and corresponding funds. Consequently, Universalists have let Unitarians set the pace, and have been content to lag behind, thinking that they were basically aiming for the same goal. Dean Angus MacLean of St. Lawrence Theological School often says that Universalism is a pioneering church. Why then are Universalists so unwilling to undertake the task that lies before them, to *lead* in the search for religious and cultural integration (wholeness, all-inclusiveness), and in the achievement of one humanity.

Some would ask why the emphasis upon ideas (truth-seeking in the analytical sense) and upon love could not be two facets of one church. The answer to this question is that the stress upon ideas and individual freedom is a prelude and a part of the concern of a universal church, but a group with this primary stress *cannot* achieve full integration. The concern for persons (and love for life in all its forms) must always come first in religion suitable for people in all walks of life. Ideas are of first importance to many in the well-educated group, but religion must first be concerned with persons. More specifically, if Universalists were to merge with Unitarians, the idea of "universalism" and all that it means would be impossible of fulfillment, since the primary teaching would be on the importance of reason, rather than on the need for wholeness. The youth group merger, with its resulting "Liberal Religious Youth" name, is an illustration of this. In place of "Universalist" the young people have accepted the designation "Liberal", which is an advance over "Unitarian" in terms of present meanings, but a retreat from the supreme title of "Universalist". This may appear to be quibbling, but it should serve to point up the whole issue at hand. Merger would serve to strengthen the lesser cause to some extent, while bypassing the greater.

Liberal Council Preferable

The most effective solution to this vital problem appears to be through mutual understanding and cooperation between these and other groups. It is perfectly possible to have a Council of Liberal Churches (or better still, a World Congress of Faiths) without eventually merging its member groups into one. Why not seek to have other groups of broad persuasion join this council, such as the Quakers, Ethical Culturists, New Thought movements, liberal Methodists, liberal Presbyterians, Vedantists, Buddhists, Brahmo Samaj, and others? In this way more strength would be gained, and at the same time each would be able to pursue its own particular objectives.

The decision to tread the lonely path of the "new synthesis"—a universal way of life—is a difficult one indeed. It requires more courage than any other decision needed in the modern world. Nevertheless, its rewards are at least in proportion to its difficulties. Before long the Universalists must make this decision, else they will lose the chance to become what they claim to be—true universalists. Where they fail, others will succeed!!!

Editorial

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diversity and cherish the richness that diversity brings. Indeed, they are convinced that American church life will be impoverished, and we will be impoverished as liberals, if Universalists and Unitarians are persuaded to surrender their distinctions and, henceforth, hold only to those things in which our differences do not emerge. They have seen in this generation the tremendous force of persuasion that conformity and uniformity have, and they can understand the potency of the argument for merger. Nevertheless, up to the present moment they continue to be opposed to merger because they feel that what we shall lose is far greater than what we shall gain.

The members of the parishes and constituent bodies of both denominations must make the decision. In the meantime we shall do ourselves and our churches a service by listening to and participating in the discussion in which we are now engaged. We may take part in it with the confidence that the other participants are honest, committed, concerned churchmen, too, seeking only what is best for all of us and for the causes to which our loyalties are directed.

The pages of this number of our magazine

are devoted entirely to a discussion of merger. It is our hope that our thinking will be stimulated, our prejudices challenged, our discussions enriched. Many points of view will be found in these pages and our list of contributors includes both Unitarian and Universalist names. Your new Editor pledges himself to this kind of free expression of opinion which will, he hopes, be broad and generous at all times, illustrative of denominational concern, and loyal to the spirit which Unitarian Christianity at its best has always demonstrated. The Editor not only welcomes but anticipates correspondence from our readers who will share with us their hopes, fears, and points of view on matters of mutual concern and their reactions to coming numbers of *The Unitarian Christian.*

— C. C. F.

A Case Against Merger

John G. MacKinnon

The most important reason for opposing merger has not been listed as an objection in the extensive report of the Joint Merger Commission, but has been rather played down as sectarianism, which is treated as a slightly soiled word. This is the likelihood, amounting almost to certainty, that the name "Unitarian" will be lost, either altogether or in some hyphenated monstrosity. There are deep emotional loyalties on the part of present Unitarians to that name. This may be sectarianism, but it is nevertheless important. Far more important, however is the fact that the name "Unitarian" is a trade mark with great sales value in our present society. It has caught on. The Unitarian name is becoming better known, as a name which stands for something distinctive and important in religion. No manufacturer would think of changing a brand name which was selling for an unknown and untried label. It might very well stop us cold in our expansion program if we were to abandon or distort by hyphenation the traditional name of our movement.

Merger Discussion Costly

Each of the local societies in both the Unitarian and Universalist denominations has been asked by the Joint Merger Commission to engage in an intensive and extensive study and discussion of the merger question this winter and early spring. If churches and fellowships take their obligations, as members of their respective movements, seriously they will spend so much time and energy on this matter that almost all other church activities will have to come to a halt, or, at least, be sharply curtailed. Because of this fact most churches and fellowships will choose to continue their customary operations and give a rather cursory look at the merger question. This is unfortunate, since it is important that we think seriously about the future of our two movements; and that future involves necessary decisions about merger.

This situation points to one of the objections to merger. Carrying out the necessary steps to effect merger will cost our local units, our regional organizations and our continental administrations a lot of time and energy, and no small amount of money. Ardent advocates of merger, of course, think this will be time, effort and money well spent if merger can be achieved. Opponents of merger think it wasted. Whether it is well spent or wasted, there will be a lot more of it used up before we are through. So, in a sense, much of the normal work of our two movements must stand aside or be postponed while we debate, consider and develop plans for merger. This will continue to be the case until the question is decided one way or the other. It would have been better, from the point of view of this expenditure of time on our normal operations, and in our program of expansion, if the issue had never been raised in the first place, Since it has been, it would now be better if it were settled with the least such expenditure possible—i.e. by abandoning the proposed merger as soon as we can.

One example of this waste is related to the uncertainty about the future. Unitarianism is launching a development fund drive, seeking to raise several million dollars. Those who are working on the initial stages of this drive are finding potential donors to be disturbed about the question of merger. It is all very well to say that if we merge we should come to the

merger as strong as possible, and if we don't, we should strengthen ourselves for our own future. This is a sound argument, but the fact that it has to be made indicates the inevitable hesitation of people to get down to the real business of the movement so long as this merger issue is pending.

The predominantly urban character of Unitarianism and the predominantly rural character of Universalism has been presented by the merger commission as a reason for merger. It has been stated that these differences are complementary and will give the combined movement a more inclusive character. I think it is reasonable to disagree. These different backgrounds are likely to lead to confusion and uncertainty as to what we are and what we stand for. It is not possible to characterize these two movements absolutely in any respect, even in this rural-urban orientation. There are many exceptions in both denominations. But as a general consequence of these differences, to which there are exceptions, of course, there is a difference in emphasis discernable in the two movements. Rural and small town people, probably of necessity, are more concerned with being like their fellows in their community, than urban people. Hence their churches are inclined to hew more closely to the line of Christian orthodoxy. Merger would increase the proportion of such Christian-oriented churches over that in the Unitarian movement, and would tend to give our movement a more Christian and conformist position. Undoubtedly there are many people in both movements who would consider this a good thing. But the unique feature and the growing point of Unitarianism has been its difference from, rather than its similarity to, conventional Christianity. Opposition to merger is based, in part, on this sort of consideration, and the danger that merger may blunt Unitarianism's growing edge.

Disproportion is Serious Problem

The experience we have had thus far, in the establishment of joint commissions, committees, and the Council of Liberal Churches, has been that both movements must be treated equally. There must be equal numbers of Unitarians and Universalists on all joint bodies. Equality of power and privilege, however, has not been accompanied by equality of financial responsibility. Those who have been doubtful about steps toward merger have not been particularly disturbed by the financial disproportion. It is right and proper that the organization with greater resources should bear a greater share of the cost. But it has seemed that the organization with greater resources should also have a preferential position in the joint operations. It is a small thing, to be sure, but the fact has rankled with some, that in making a combination of the two names Universalist has been placed first. This is in accord with neither the relative strength of the movements, nor with the alphabet. It can only be a gesture to allay the fear of the Universalists that they may lose their identity. Some of us oppose merger because we fear that the whole operation may become distorted and disproportionate through the continued application of this conciliating gesture.

Perhaps the most inclusive argument against merger is that there is so little to be gained by it. We will increase our numbers from about 110,000 to about 150,000. There may, or may not be increased efficiency of denominational operations and administration, though no substantial hopes are held out by the merger commission for any financial saving through merger. If we Unitarians were to tend to our knitting, use our selling name for expansion, and not waste effort and time in struggling over the problems of merger, we would, at our present rate of growth, have 150,000 members in about six years. This would be as soon as merger could reasonably be effected, at the earliest.

Merger, or church union, is an ideal of great popularity today. The fragmentation of Christianity has been a public scandal, so the popular view is that churches ought to get together. However, there are few who would be willing to carry this philosophy to complete fulfillment by re-entering the Church of Rome. Most would want to stop the practice of church union somewhere short of this. I suggest that the easy and popular acceptance of the thesis that church union is a good thing, is a serious mistake. Religious pluralism has been one of the strengths of America. It has been a particular strength of Unitarianism. We ought to say either that religious pluralism is not good, that churches should get together into one big church; or we ought to maintain the value of religious pluralism. To say that church union

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What About Merger

Kenneth L. Patton

Consideration of merger between our two denominations, the Unitarian and the Universalist, can be likened to the marriage of two individuals. If there is real affection and honest desire for the marriage, seemingly insurmountable obstacles can be brushed aside; if there is not, then any little annoyance will be magnified until it will be in fact insurmountable. It is for this reason that all the objections to merger that I have heard so far amuse me. For they are not the real reasons, but rather rationalizations behind which the real reasons are screened. The real reason is the antipathies of difference, and the two denominations are equally the prey of them.

In seeking the source of the antipathies that are motivating the criticism of merger, the best insights seem to come from the new sociology of social class. The major work to date is *Social Class in America* by Warner, Meeker and Eels. America has amused itself with the pleasant myth that social class distinctions are either absent from our equalitarian democracy, or of little significance. Their studies prove this to be illusion. One of the major areas in which social class differences tend to be selective is in membership of institutions, and churches are no exception. Some of them cut across social class divisions, but they fall into ready categories.

The major difficulty facing merger is that the Unitarian Denomination is heavily an upper class institution, and the Universalists are mainly a middle class group. I am, personally, in a position of detachment from both groups, having come from the lower class. In my journey of "upward mobility," I have become quite aloof from any social-class identity. I am quite unidentified with and un-merged with any social-class group, a sociological lone-wolf, as it were. Thus I am equally astounded at both denominations, in the way that they allow their emotions and their judgments to be victimized by the considerations of social class, seemingly with almost complete unawareness. What rubbing of elbows I have done with people in the middle and upper classes convinces me that education and social position are likely to render people more naive in some things rather than less.

Social class is not, in the studies of Warner *et al.*, set up as some sort of Marxist shibboleth. It is a gathering term for very concrete differences in family, background, education, advantages, mores and living standards. Kinsey has discovered surprising correspondences between social status and sexual behavior. It isn't any myth of social class that acts as a barrier to merger considerations, but the very real differences in attitude and behavior that exist between Universalists and Unitarians through this phenomenon.

Social Distinctions An Issue

I was first struck with this when I came to Boston and hied me to the sacred precincts of Harvard to get information about religious preferences of the students. I discovered there were seven Universalist students and seven hundred Unitarian students. Harvard is *the* symbol of education for the upper classes. The administration attempts to modify this with a liberal scholarship for worthy students who were injudicious enough to be born into the wrong families, but generous as this is, it is only a patch on a very elite garment.

In other less prestige-endowed colleges, the ratio of Universalist to Unitarian students would be higher, but discrepancies would still occur, because a college education is still, in spite of the GI Bill, a statistical indication of social class. This has been a difficulty in relation to the college-age program of LRY, where primarily Unitarian college groups far outnumber the Universalist. In the high-school age activities, however, the two denominations are fairly equal. This discrepancy also appears in the publication program of the two denominations, for intellectualism and the reading of serious books is much heavier in the upper classes.

Since the people, in general, belong to different organizations and run in different "crowds," they seldom are well acquainted with one another, even when they have churches right across the street from one another, which occurs

in two suburbs of Boston. This has also frustrated the merging of local congregations, but when their plight becomes severe enough these differences have been successfully hurdled. Another indication is the greater number of rural and small town churches among the Universalists, especially outside New England, and the urban centeredness of the Unitarians. This difference is historical, since the Unitarians began by taking over congregational First Parishes in New England, and Hoseah Ballou, the Universalist Leader, came off the farm with hay-seed still in the cuffs of his trousers. The manner of theological behavior was also typical, for the Universalists were Bible-centered proof-texters, whereas the Unitarian divines were graced with the philosophical suavities of Transcendentalism and the Harvard Divinity School.

During the last twenty years, what with World War II, the cold war and McCarthyism, the American middle class in particular, and our populace in general, have become less liberal, less concerned with civil liberties, more orthodox and conservative theologically. The major counter-action of this trend has been in the growth of the University populations, and it is no accident that the Unitarian Extension Department considers adjacency to a college or university a prime advantage for a new church or fellowship. Universalists have been much less geared to the university population.

I believe that liberalism in general is expansive in American society, and both groups will profit by it ultimately. I think it much more likely that Universalists will be envigorated by Unitarian dynamism, than that Unitarians will be slowed down by the Universalists. If the major aim, however, is the increase of liberal religion *regardless of label,* I can see only niggardly and provincial feelings in the protest of some Unitarians that Universalists might benefit by Unitarian push and money come a merger. What if they did? Wouldn't they then be all part of the same denomination in any case?

But as a Universalist I do not believe the benefits would be all in one direction. There is a less than ingratiating tendency on the part of some Unitarian dissidents to merger to take any attractive feature or movement within Universalism, and discount it as not typical, as not really Universalist anyway.

Significance of Unitarian Growth

What has occurred, and it might have been predicted by a student of social class sociology, is that the liberal revolution that began to erupt in Unitarianism thirty years ago, gained headway in Universalism only ten years ago. That is, due to being a middle class group, there was a twenty year lag before the ideas that stirred Unitarians began to aggravate the Universalists. But, in the long run, this twenty year gap is of no great consequence. There has been a very considerable development in Universalism of late, to the point that in the revision of rules and by-laws, pronouncements, fellowship and ordination rulings, we have outstripped the Unitarians. There is a really vigorous upsurge of ideas and vitality in the Universalist denomination, that is not to be tabulated in figures of growth in numbers. In fact, some Universalists, and even some Unitarians, haxe expressed the fear that the increase of numbers and popularity of Unitarianism might mean a watering down of their liberal genius. In some local situations new people have come in faster than they can be assimilated and oriented. They remain "unfinished" liberals inasmuch as their previous experience has not fully educated them into the implications of the free-mind principle. I know one minister whose experience was that success in growth of numbers changed his parish into a much more conventional group, one offering him much less opportunity for the liberal ministry as he conceived it, than the same church did when smaller. And this is a Univerlist, not a Unitarian parish. I am convinced, personally, that liberal religion as a creative, "protestant" movement, has much more to fear from too fast growth than it has to fear from remaining small. Because of this I do not find the Unitarians bragging about the success of their extension activities quite as reassuring as they seem to expect I should.

What has impressed me about both denominations, however, is that they have survived for 150 years, evolved in ideas and practices, shown amazing vigor and influence, even though they did not grow in size. For this reason I am not afraid of merger. For this does not make us any larger; it only allows us the facilities of better co-ordination of efforts and services, better lines of interior communication and external public relations. If we want to take a military analogy,

let us not forget that in the last war, the lithe, mobile panzer divisions defeated the Maginot Line. Massiveness was no guarantee of power.

For the last ten years I have been a member of both families, because, although being a minister of a Universalist church, I have not severed my Unitarian associations. On a practical level, the Meeting House ignores denominational lines, and has for ten years acted as if there were already one denomination. We have found that many people in other churches also feel and act in this way, especially those in the increasing numbers of federated churches. And I believe that if the merger does not take place, this kind of "unofficial" fraternization and local merger will continue until the legal merger will be forced by the patent impossibility of drawing organizational lines between us.

The differences of theology and approach now existing within each denomination are strikingly parallel, indicating that they result from differing points of view in our culture in general, which would be reflected in any liberal movement within that culture. For example, roughly the same differences occur in the Ethical Societies, and even more dramatically among the Friends. Even so, the differences are not as significant as the heat of controversy would indicate them to be. In the Disciples we encompassed every theology and parish practice from A to Z. To paraphrase Dorothy Parker's famous dramatic criticism, the Unitarians and Universalists run the theological gamut from Y to Z.

If the merger takes place, all the differing factions will find about equal comfort and support among the birds of similar feather in the other denomination. I cannot see that the lines of discussion, nor the relative weight of opposing factions, will be significantly altered by merger. I have no fear of what will happen when the Christian Universalists get in league with the Christian Unitarians. I am not afraid of all the massed powers of the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox bodies put together.

I should think the attitude of the Christian factions would be somewhat similar to those of us in the two camps who call ourselves variously humanists, naturalists and universalists with a lower case u. In fact, if we are all firmly attached to the principles of freedom of mind and belief and congregational identity and autonomy, neither group has anything to fear of the other. In fact, a merger between two *free* churches is quite a different thing than a merger between two more or less orthodox denominations. They are merging creeds and authoritarian procedures; we are merging freedoms from these things. Thus merger, for us, will in no wise curtail our liberties or oppress existing differences if we maintain our liberal genius.

We *are* one religious fellowship already. Thousands of us have proved this by living as if we were already merged, and we have the proof of the experience of *one* fellowship under two names. Our denominational structure, with our already merged activities, is a duplex house in any case. All we need to do is knock out the intervening partition (I am quite sure it is not a sustaining wall) to force any radical remodelling of the building. Shall we hurry up, get our building permit, and get this minor matter settled, so we can get on with the really important matters of free religion?

(*A Case Against Merger—Cont.*)

is good, but not too much of it; or that religious pluralism is good but not too much of it, is a half-way house. We need to think through our own real and important values as they relate to this matter. We need to make our decision in terms of these values, not in terms of what is currently popular.

". . . So, I Favor The Organic Separateness of A.U.A. and U.C.A."

George J. W. Pennington

Merger considerations are not easy matters to deliberate. They produce a number of conflicting feelings, each perspective capable of some rationale. Moreover, years of cooperation, similarity of methodology and shared concerns between Unitarians and Universalists make objective reflection of the matters relative to merger very difficult.

Not the least challenging factor in these considerations are the individual social involvements that almost every Unitarian and Universalist has with folks who belong to the other denomination. Yet, even more challenging an adversary to objectivity is the pressure of our society on every one of us, a demand to join with other persons and groups, and this is manifested on every level of living, from the obvious merit of international associations functioning through the United Nations, to the level of the kind of problem we consider in merger proposals. In the latter case, as in the former, there seems to be merit in joining, but here, in this latter situation, perhaps more than in other facets of life, because of the liberal methodology of Unitarians and Universalists we may be able to evaluate the easily adopted and commonly accepted virtue of joining, and do so with some concern for preserving the freedom and individual integrity of the human spirit. As this has been a dynamic factor in the traditions of both Unitarians and Universalists, it is unthinkable that it should not be continued by both groups, and if anything, expanded by both groups to meet increasing demands for conformity. The demand felt in our religious associations, as well as in other cultural groupings, for merging of this and that, joining of this and that, is not of itself consonant with the vital character of either Unitarian or Universalist history.

For these, and for many more reasons, merger considerations are not easy to contemplate. Yet, I hasten to indicate that from my point of view, it is stimulating for us to do precisely that, for in the process, that which is important to this Unitarian or that Unitarian, to this Universalist or that Universalist, receives a wider hearing, and is re-evaluated in the minds of those who have been in possession of one or more of the variety of cherished convictions characteristic of Unitarianism and Universalism. ism.

The price of merger considerations has been confusion on every level. It is a fact, not without its regrettable, tangible ramifications on the local scenes, particularly.

Clergy and laity have been challenged. It will have been worthwhile, if the matter shall be resolved finally not in this way or that way, necessarily, but if the matter shall be resolved finally with conviction productive of useful motivation for religious service and adequate churchmanship either one way or the other. It is entirely possible that such a fruitful outcome may not occur, but during these months of consideration we may strive to clarify our individual viewpoints, so that given a final decision to merge or not individual Unitarians and Universalists may themselves be the substance and potential for a new start in religious service and adequate churchmanship.

Merger Material Not Objective

It is in some such a vein of thinking that the members of the Joint Commission on Merger and various officials of both the AUA and UCA have urged on repeated occasions full study and discussion of the manuals on merger considerations. Understandably, the officials of both denominations are concerned about the vitality of the religious service and churchmanship of the two groups whether or not they merge or become involved in the proposed alternatives to merger. Consequently, they have urged on our churches study and discussion of the materials provided, choosing to make such urging in the name of democracy. In copy sent to the editor of The Universalist Leader in October, I endeavored to indicate why the materials presented by the Merger Commission were a

preposterous illustration of the democratic process when utilized, as officials have urged, as objective study material, when in fact it is extremely doubtful that all the officials who urged churches to use the manuals for study material even read the materials before urging the churches to study them. There is no proof of this except that the time-factor alone between urgings received in the mail and the publication of the material lends substance to this conjecture and observation.

Yet, putting this aside as nothing more than well-intentioned zeal, the dominant tone of the manuals in favor of merger seems clear to this writer, to many others and to at least one member of the Joint Commission. Indeed, the material is not fit for objective study purposes, and like this writing, is expressive of a particular conviction relative to merger, though not as openly so. The manuals are not simply about a matter that is controversial. They are themselves controversial material.

What of proposals for merger? There are many reasons which appear to give favorable support to merger. Could we reduce the aggregate overhead of the two denominations? It would seem so, and yet a vigorous program, wider services and, in particular, problems of immediate adjustment do not appear to validate such a conclusion. There is no clear answer to this question one way or the other. There would be larger numbers, obviously, but not the total of the previous separate constituencies, and whether or not gain in numbers that could be attributed with definiteness to merger would ever equal and significantly exceed immediate loss, and the eventual loss of dissatisfied persons, is nothing more than a guess one way or the other. Of course, merger would accomplish one thing, namely that of giving support and encouragement to the liberals in both denominations, providing that there is sufficient commitment to liberalism as a methodology in religion so that this would meet with wide-spread acceptance as the unifying factor of the joined groups. Reflection about this matter brings this writer to feel that there is considerable doubt as to the extent of the commitment to liberalism as a methodology in either denomination, the feeling that much that passes for liberalism may be idiosyncracy, and, moreover, and most important, that this is not in and of itself sufficient for the propagation of a religion, anymore than it was sufficient to the founding of either Unitarianism or Universalism. Both groups were created to promote not a methodology, but rather certain convictions that were characteristic of each, along with certain tenets that they expressed in common with each other, and with views expressed by other religious groupings as well. It is helpful to this writer to be mindful of this fact, for while liberalism is an essential methodology of his faith, it is the fruit of his convictions, and not the end-goal or the seed-bed for this faith. It is a means of knowing in religion, and just as Reform Judaism espouses the cause of religious liberalism and yet has convictions peculiar to it, the contention, made by some who would hasten to merger, that Unitarianism and Universalism are nothing more than religious liberalism is a hollow contention, and has no substance in the history of either groups. Both Unitarianism and Universalism exist as religious concepts entirely apart from the individual or corporate views of Unitarians or Universalists. Thankfully, these considerations of merger generated in our midst have provided generous evidence that there are Unitarians and Universalists in the present who are committed to the religious concepts of Unitarianism and Universalism as matters which, while not unrelated, are nonetheless other than liberalism per se.

Universalism is not Unitarianism

It seems to me because of the genuineness of the fellowship between Unitarian and Universalist ministers and layfolk, because of our common concern for the cause of religious liberalism, and due to our history of cooperative relations, that fiscal matters, public relations problems, personnel factors, etc., etc., etc., could be dissolved if there was nothing more profound to justify the continued organic separateness of the AUA and the UCA.

Now, it is necessary that I state as succinctly as possible what I understand Universalism to be, and then point out why I feel this is not consonant with Unitarianism. First, I will attempt to make clear my understanding of Universalism, having here neither the space nor appropriate opportunity to go into detail.

I believe in the existence of a Force for Good that cannot be put aside or defeated, but which

is unconquerable. I really do not care what this Force for Good is called, and I find it equally meaningful to speak of this in terms of the cogency of contemporary psychology or in theistic terms. I believe that this Force is discoverable in the life of every individual, none excepted, making that life of supreme worth in and of itself, and causing that person to do only what he, as distinguishable from his environmental demands, thinks is good. Such a relatedness between a Force for Good and all individuals demands that I seek to be unqualifiedly accepting of every personality, relatedness and acceptance being the contemporary expression of what was historically termed "salvation". This then is universal salvation, or Universalism, as I understand it. It has other ramifications. Indeed, because of the omnipotent quality of this Force for Good, evil is not a reality in and of itself but rather an effect of creation being continuous, our universe something to be explored with confidence, life to be faced with affirmation and assurance. Rather than be lulled to acquiescence by the omnipotence of the Force for Good, the individual finds fulfillment in its expression through the use of intelligence, affirmative responses to life situations, and inclusive motivations in his life.

Now, all of us have elaborations that individually we exert on almost every concept, whether in religion, economics or politics. I have elaborations that I frequently add to what I have indicated briefly is my understanding of Universalism. For example, I prefer to express Universalism in the terms that contemporaries usually find in their everyday speech and thought, referring to the Force for Good by the evidence that has been accumulated in laboratories and scientific studies relative to man's nature. These observations of contemporary disciplines define the worth of man and the manner in which man must relate to man in order to nurture both individual personality and corporate well-being.

I earnestly hope that the AUA and the UCA will maintain their organic separateness for the following reasons:—Unitarianism as I read of it, and as I contact it in the fellowship of ministers, simply is not only not Universalism as I understand it, but, moreover, it is contrary to Universalism as I understand it. In general (and I say "in general" because extensively to document this article is to make it both tedious and unnecessarily lengthy) Unitarians, as such, do not believe in the existence of a Force for Good (again call this what you will), certainly, they do not as Unitarians believe in a Force for Good that is omnipotent. Their acceptance of man and men is highly conditional, dependent on consensus among themselves as to what is approved behavior. Unlike orthodoxy at large, Unitarianism as I contact it does not seem to me to accept man and men on qualifications of faith; its acceptance depends on whether or not man and men adhere to qualities of character, creative expression, altruism and intelligent concern, as these have come to be generally understood and accepted among Unitarians, as "in-group requirements" and, I regret, among too many non-Unitarians, as well. Unitarians may think they have out-grown James Freeman Clarke's statement in reference to "salvation by character", but they have not, for to regard man's nature as being perfectible rather than as being good is to make conditional acceptance of man and men inevitable. Regrettably, Unitarians do seem to have cast aside another part of the same statement:—". . . onward and upward forever". This has been construed to be naive, but while it may be expressed in an unfortunate manner, so as to create the impression that things will improve by themselves, it is yet a far more vital and dynamic expression of positive faith than seems to this writer to be indicated by Unitarians currently, and, incidentally, is in its deeper sense consonant with Universalism as I understand it.

It is perhaps enough to say that I earnestly hope that the AUA and UCA maintain their separateness because the climate of inclusive and affirmative conviction is not shared by Unitarians, in my estimation, and that Universalists have a unique function beyond the considerations of man's attainment or lack of attainment, considerations of his belief or unbelief, his methodologies, beyond all of these latter things, some of which seem to me to characterize the concerns of Unitarians. Universalists have a distinctive acceptance of man and men that is basic to their faith, and to be committed to Universalism is not the same thing as being committed to Unitarian concepts.

Unitarians as I have come to know them, and I honor them for this, seem to me to be primarily

(*Continued on page* 16)

Merger is a Good Thing and Why it Isn't

Frank Edwin Smith

I believe in mergers if the groups merging are fairly equal ideologically, functionally, emotionally, and in native intelligence; not necessarily equal financially or in numbers.

For instance the mergers among the various Luthern Synods seem to be a most logical procedure because of their being somuch alike in all of the fundamentals of pure Lutheranism.

The merger between Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant was likewise a merger well advised.

Presbyterians and United Presbyterians offer a quite logical set-up for merger.

The merger between Congregationalists and Christians, and with Evangelicals and the Reformed Church does not seem so natural nor so likely to bring about a happy merger without much loss of identity and strength. Congregationalism already has become much more conservative than it was formerly.

On the face of it the proposed merger between Unitarians and Universalists looks like a sensible and altogether right thing to do. In fact it is the type of thing I believe in and should like to see come to pass if both parties to the contract are to be benefitted and strengthened by the merger.

Would such be the case in a merger between Unitarians and Universalists? I should hope so, but I am not sure. In fact I greatly doubt that there would be real value in such a merger at this time. I regret to have to say this but I must be honest to my own convictions as a result of my personal observations and experiences in keeping with the facts.

Why am I not sure of the advisability of such a merger now? The important test of the strength of any denomination is the measure of strength resident in its ministry. It hurts to say what I must now tell you. I do so without any antipathy in my heart and without personal reference to anyone. I speak in deepest sincerity. People are saying it behind closed doors. It is time that we brought it into the open and honestly faced the facts. What I refer to is stated briefly in the following two or three paragraphs.

Our Ministries Are Weak

For sometime now our Unitarian ministry has been growing weaker as a group. We do not have a star of first, or of second, or even of third magnitude anywhere in our sky. To be sure we have some good men, but too few. Our ministry though of average strength is far too weak to do the job that needs to be done in our Unitarian cause, and too inadequate to meet the great challenge which we face. An alarming number of our men do not know how to preach, and an equally large number either do not know how to be good ministers or do not care to be. No doubt we are doing and shall do an average job but our ministry is not strong enough to do what really needs to be done and could be done. Our challenge is not great enough in its appeal to enlist the interest of strong, capable, good men.

We may have a stronger ministry if we wish, but we must do some house cleaning in several directions before we can hope to strengthen our ministry internally and to increase the number of ministers.

The ministry of our Universalist friends also is weak, all too weak. Yes, the Universalists have some good men, but too few. No first, second or third magnitude men here either. They, too, have an alarming dearth of good preachers and good ministers. I regret to have to say that as a group, I fear the Universalist ministry is much weaker than the Unitarian ministry.

It is quite doubtful in my mind if two such groups should merge until each has strengthened its ministerial ranks. I feel convinced that the standard of the Unitarian ministry as a group would be lowered if merger took place. This we could ill afford to have happen at a time when our own ministry needs to be strengthened so greatly.

Would it not be better for both Unitarians and Universalists to strengthen first their own ministries before attempting to bring the two inadequately fitted groups together. To merge now might very well mean a confused and even weaker ministry as a group percentage wise.

We can ill afford to allow this to happen.

Universalism Declining

In the second place, we should realize that for some time the Universalists have been failing in strength and at a frightening rate. They have been losing members and churches at death-knell speed.

At the same time the Unitarians have been growing in strength and in numbers of people and churches at a tremendous rate.

Therefore, it ought to be clear to us that the two groups are not comparable in this respect. The one would not complement the other. In order for a merger to be valuable and successful the one must be the complement of the other.

To merge, then, at this time would likely mean that the Unitarians would not only be greatly weakened but they could easily have their success and progress reversed due to their energies and interests being consumed in trying to revive dying organization.

This does not mean that we should oppose merger for all time, but at this time, yes. Let our Universalist friends strengthen their organization and get it moving in the other and right direction. In other words let them stabilize their own household and place it on a solid basis after which merger would be in order.

If I were an ardent and sincere Universalist as I am a Unitarian, I should not wish my denomination to merge when the odds were so much against my own group. First of all I should not wish to weaken the group I was joining, but on the other hand, above everything else, I should not wish my group to be swallowed up or to lose its identity as I am sure it would under such circumstances. As sincere Unitarians we should not wish to do this either. Let our Universalist friends, therefore, strengthen and stabilize their own denomination first, then let us consider merger.

Merger Strengthens Conservatism

In the third place the two denominations should have very real correspondence ideologically. But they do not have ideological similitude. There are some very fine liberal Universalist churches, but they are too few. A great number of the Universalist churches are much more conservative as a group than Unitarian churches are as a group. Many of their churches would be more happy with Congregationalists or with Methodists, in my judgment.

What will this mean if we merge? The history of mergers makes very clear what will happen. The more progressive, more active, and more liberal group levels off towards the more conservative and less active and less progressive group. I went through the merger of the United Lutheran Church, a sizeable merger indeed. I was secretary of the Pittsburg Synod of the General Synod Lutheran Church at the time. My Synod was the most liberal of the three bodies merging to make up the United Lutheran Church. But in the merger it lost whatever tinge of liberalism it had, and the merged bodies became much more confessional and they levelled off to the more conservative emphasis represented in the other groups. And thus it has happened in other groups also. This is the history of mergers.

We need only expect a more conservative, less active, less progressive denomination if Unitarians and Universalists merge now. It is my honest judgment that the Unitarian movement might very easily be set back and retarded as much as fifty or more years.

The Merger Commission has not presented to us these facts and possibilities adequately. But many are talking about them in the quiet. It is not fair to either Unitarians or to Universalists to keep these matters in the dark. Now is the time to be frank and fair and then if we are still interested in merger, no one will have been fooled.

However, would it not be better for the two bodies to put off merger until conditions are more favorable for merger, and more fair and helpful to both denominations; and in the meantime to work together not as a Council but as quite independent denominations in those matters where they may be able to share the work in common?

From The President's Desk

"In a society, a word means what ninety-nine percent of the population think it means, regardless of its truthful definition. Although the dictionary says, a Christian is one who follows the teaching of Jesus, our society knows a Christian as one who takes Jesus as his Lord and personal Savior."

The above quotation is from the "Youth Leader's" report of the October meeting of the Norfolk-Suffolk Federation of Liberal Religious Youth, when the group debated the resolution: "We, the members of the Norfolk-Suffolk Federation of Liberal Religious Youth, profess that we are Christians." The interesting device was used of lining up "A Conservative Party or Christians" seated on the right and "Liberals or Non-Christians" on the left, and, according to British House of Commons procedure, any member was free to change his mind and walk across the room to the opposing side during the debate. With several abstentions the resolution was defeated thirty-three to twenty-eight.

It is much more probable that "ninety-nine percent of the population" of the U.S.A. and Canada consider a Christian as one who follows the teachings of Jesus than the opposite statement in the paragraph quoted above. When you hear it said of someone who leads an exemplary life or who performs good deeds or exhibits attitudes of kindliness, forgiveness and unselfishness, "He is a real Christian," does it not mean someone who follows the teachings of Jesus? Emerson said: "Men are better than their creeds." To the majority of laymen the dogmas of the theologians mean little or nothing but Jesus' statement, "By their fruits ye shall know them" has been a criterion for genuine Christianity for centuries.

Unitarian Christians are products of Christian Culture and believe that Unitarians have preserved the spiritual insights and essence of the Christian ethic to help them to analyze and evaluate the forces at work in contemporary culture. Why discard one's family name? Must we meet people of other cultures with diffidence and lack of confidence in our own dignity?

Should we not rather set about deepening our insights and joining forces to make our culture more worthy of respect and our contributions to the world religious body of truth less obscured by social customs and mores which excite contempt rather than admiration? Because we develop and strengthen our own commitments does not mean that we cannot meet others with friendly understanding and appreciation. Indeed we have an inner compulsion to do just that but we also have a right to expect that we shall be accorded the same courtesy.

I am reminded that a group of Unitarian Christians, led by Dr. Samuel A. Eliot and Dr. Charles W. Wendte founded the International Council of Religious Liberals in Boston nearly sixty years ago, when an eminent Hindu added his voice to those pleading for international brotherhood. The purpose of the Council as stated was "to open communication with those of all lands who are striving to unit pure religion with perfect liberty and increase fellowship and cooperation among them." This statement was unanimously adopted by that first assembly. It is strange in the light of these facts that one of the speakers against the young people's resolution quoted Jesus' statement "Let the dead bury their dead"—"meaning that the early Unitarian Christians are gone and although we cherish their teachings we must pass on to new things."

"So you thing it's new?" Let us not forget to try to catch up with those past leaders before we go down too many "blind alleys" and retrogress!

Paul Harmon Chapman

[At the invitation of Mr. Chapman, Dr. Joseph Barth, minister of King's Chapel, Boston, has summarized his arguments in the debate alluded to in the President's letter. Dr. Barth's summary appears below. Ed.]

Unitarians are Christian

first: in their cultural and theological rootage in the Reformation and in American out of Puritan Congregationalism. To know history is to know this.

secondly: Unitarians are Christian in their own greatest leadership, Martineau for instance in England, William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker in America. All three of these asserted, against all

critics from within or from without Unitarianism, that they were Christian. Granted that Christian is a word that means different things to differing people, these called themselves Christian and we are direct theological and philosophical descendents of theirs. If we know our own history we know we are. If we don't know it we still are its product.

thirdly: We are Christian in that we practice congregational polity, an invention of the left wing of the reformation and prevelant among our churches now. If this polity welcomes all persons to church membership and urges them to freedom in development of religious faith, it does so basically in the large spirit of that master of men who said: "Come all ye." That we are not authoritarian Christians but liberal ones, that we make confession of no dogma a test for membership is only proof that liberal Christianity is superior to authoritarian varieties. It is none the less Christian for being in the larger and more inclusive tradition of religion in which as Paul said there is neither "north nor south," "slave nor free," "east nor west," "Gentile nor Jew." At its best "Christian" means "inclusive." Unitarianism, in this sense, is Christianity at its best.

(*Organic Separateness—Cont.*)

concerned about discovering truth in religious understanding. Universalism's primary concern is that of making unconditional love the most significant motivation in human decisions. These two things are related, it seems to me, when they are usefully implemented by living men in living affairs, but as primary objectives of religious fellowships they are galaxies apart.

Introducing Our Contributors

John G. MacKinnon is a Unitarian minister and graduate of the Municipal University of Akron, the University of Chicago and the Meadville Theological School. Minister of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington, Del. since 1946, he has served churches in Wichita, Kan. and Richmond, Va. He was for five years in the Universalist ministry.

Kenneth L. Patton is minister of the Charles Street Meeting House (Universalist) in Boston. Before coming to Boston in 1948 he was for seven years minister of the Unitarian Church in Madison, Wis. Mr. Patton was in the ministry of the Christian Church from 1936 to 1941. He holds degrees from Eureka College and the University of Chicago.

George J. W. Pennington is a minister of the Universalist Church. A graduate of Tufts University and Crane Theological School, he is minister of the White Memorial Universalist Church in Concord, N.H. Prior to this he was minister of the Universalist Church of Arlington, Mass.

Frank Edwin Smith, minister of the new Unitarian Church of Clearwater, Fla., was for fourteen years Executive Secretary and Regional Director of the Southern New England Regional Council, and for sixteen years minister of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, Pa. A graduate of Gettysburg College and Gettysburg Theological School he was in the Lutheran ministry for ten years before entering the Unitarian ministry.

Leland P. Stewart is a Universalist minister and a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School. Pastor of the Universalist Church of Hollywood, Cal., he is also Director of the Center for Universal Religion.